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APRIL 6, 2022

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**This is post 25 of 34 in the series “*Public Meetings Report*”**

*A recap of select open meetings at the local, county, and state level. Produced in partnership with City Bureau’s Documenters.*

## Mar. 16

Several technology-related initiatives—including plans for a digital highway billboard network—were discussed and approved during four **Cook County Board of Commissioners** committee [meetings](#). Thomas Lynch, chief information officer for the county’s Bureau of Technology, proposed contracts totaling more than \$22 million. Two key contracts were reviewed: one to manage the county’s voice and data contracts (\$21.7 million over two years) and one for light detection and ranging (LiDAR) data acquisition (\$1.17 million for one year). LiDAR is used to make high-resolution maps and can be used to support the Cook County Assessor, Board of Review, and public safety and environmental agencies and departments. After nearly a year of debate, a contract for digital highway billboards covering three-to-five



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commenters were opposed to the proposal at its introduction in June 2021, but board member Ammar Rizki suggested that these concerns have been addressed. The billboards cost about \$750,000 each to create and install. In addition, American Rescue Plan Act funding will allow Cook County to undertake another twenty community programming initiatives to address issues of alternatives to policing, behavioral health, water, climate resiliency infrastructure, and transportation.

### **Mar. 17**

The alleged harmful impact of a pumping station, a high school contest to design a new county flag (the first since 1961), and the high costs of temporary staffing for Cook County Health were among several topics considered at the **Cook County Board of Commissioners** [meeting](#). A key point regarding the pumping station was that a complaining resident had reached out to several government agencies but had received no response. Commissioner Scott Britton said he would follow up because the station is in his district. Cook County Health is scheduled to receive grants from the federal and state government for drug and mental health treatment programs. Cook County Health and SEIU Local 73 have still not agreed on a contract, which is costing taxpayers fees paid to temporary staffing agencies. A number of agreements for construction are pending with cities, towns, and villages to reduce traffic congestion, improve



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A series of panel discussions to bring youth, **ESPAÑOL INVOLVED** community leaders, and police together to discuss various issues is being planned by The Chicago Youth Council for Police Accountability, which is a one-year paid leadership opportunity for residents ages fourteen to twenty-five. It's managed by We Are Able, Chicago200, Youth Guidance, and Becoming A Man (BAM). At this month's [meeting](#) of the **Chicago Police Board**, youth council representative Mia Bonds said the events will be in May, and Police Board president Ghian Foreman said the board is working with the council to better understand youth perspectives on policing. The board is also coordinating a police station visit for the group because a youth council member reported that they were having trouble contacting the District 1 police station. CPD reviewed its ongoing partnership with Chicago Survivors, namely the creation of a family liaison unit within each of the CPD's five detective bureaus. These units are responsible for coordinating with groups to support families affected by homicide. The board also reviewed two COPA recommendations for discipline of police officers for excessive use of force against protesters, including that officer Nicholas Jovanovich be discharged from CPD for striking Miracle Boyd and making a false report.

### Mar. 21

A demolition surcharge covering Pilsen and the 606



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residential buildings, advocates said at a [meeting](#) of the **City Council Committee on Finance**. Since the demolition surcharge was imposed and compared to pre-pandemic levels, demolitions have fallen by eighty percent around the 606 and twenty percent in Pilsen, Housing Commissioner Marisa Novara reported. The surcharge is a fee of at least \$15,000 or \$5,000 per unit on residential demolitions (whichever is greater) and is intended to protect naturally occurring affordable housing in gentrifying areas. The current demolition rates are significantly lower than in comparable parts of Humboldt Park and Little Village, Novara said. The demolition surcharge has brought in \$120,000 for affordable housing and homeownership grants. Originally a one-year pilot, the surcharge will now extend through April 2024. During public comment, real estate and construction representatives, who oppose the program, argued that the surcharge is arbitrary, limits the options of long-term owners, and exacerbates segregation by discouraging investment. Representatives of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association who support the measure said it helps to preserve affordable housing for people of color. An analysis by DePaul's Institute for Housing Studies revealed the city is losing two- and four-flat residential units, which are a key source of affordable housing.

The City treasurer has divested about \$70 million in treasury assets from coal, oil, and natural gas industries, as reported at the **City Council** joint



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**Protection and Energy.** Two key City Council committees approved an ordinance to require the treasurer's office to maintain a list of the companies emitting the most carbon and in which the treasurer is not investing. Council members applauded both the environmental implications of the move, but emphasized the need for smart financial decision-making, citing the increasing volatility of fossil fuels and the risks to future investments that climate change poses.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) representatives presented about school renaming, chronic absenteeism, truancy, and safety and security at the **Local School Council (LSC) Advisory Board meeting**. Former Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) official Michael Brunson said that meeting minutes and video conferences should be posted publicly to ensure that the LSCAB is following protocols. Liam Bird, CPS director of racial equity initiatives, discussed promoting equity and anti-racism through processes for naming or renaming schools. The naming process is designed so that community members and students must work together to determine new names. Fifty percent of students in a school are to be surveyed. He noted that sixty percent of schools are named after white males. The purpose of the LSCAB is to advise the Board of Education on issues related to LSC elections, operations, powers, duties, and school improvement plans.



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## Mar. 23

Council members cast their votes electronically at this month's **City Council [meeting](#)** using tablets—the culmination of months of preparation by the City clerk's office. Traditionally, the City Council has used a voice vote, in which the City clerk performs a roll call of council members with each replying “yea” or “nay.” In February, the clerk's office explained that in the initial phase of rollout, e-voting would be



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meetings. After each electronic vote, a digital display indicates how each alderperson voted and the total count of votes for and against. Eventually, e-voting will be available for committee meetings and remote participation. Council member David Moore expressed concerns that the “silent” voting would make it more challenging for constituents to hold their elected officials accountable, but was appeased when he learned that members could request an oral vote.

Some **Board of Education** members expressed dismay at their meeting that more of the \$1.8 billion federally allocated COVID relief funds had not yet been spent. They were concerned that urgent student social, emotional, and other needs after two years of pandemic-related learning disruptions demanded more support. CPS has spent 6.6 percent of the \$1.8 billion provided, or \$118 million. CPS CEO Pedro Martinez explained that the district’s expenditures outpace state spending and were delayed due to the Omicron spike in COVID cases and other logistical challenges. Martinez said more detailed budget information would be released in the next two months.

### Mar. 25

The **Cook County Health and Hospitals System Board of Directors** has launched the Change Institute to develop new strategies to bridge gaps in





disproportionate deaths in communities of color—  
cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. At the  
system's board [meeting](#), Cook County Health CEO  
Israel Rocha, Jr. said the response to treat and cure  
COVID-19 inspired the creation of the institute in  
order to treat such diseases with the same effort and  
commitment as the health provider has treated the  
COVID pandemic.

### Mar. 28

Nicole Lee was confirmed as the 11th Ward  
alderperson by the **City Council** during a [special  
session](#). The first Asian-American woman to serve on  
the City Council, Lee fills the vacancy left by Patrick  
Daley Thompson upon his conviction of tax fraud.  
Lee was appointed by Mayor Lightfoot and is seen as  
a strategic choice as calls intensify for the 11th Ward  
to be redistricted with a majority Asian population.  
She will finish out Thompson's term but has not said  
whether she will run for the seat in the February 2023  
municipal elections. During public comment, a  
member of the 11th Ward Independent Political  
Organization expressed frustration that the selection  
process took place "behind closed doors" and called  
for a more transparent selection process.

### Mar. 29

Community members called for the preservation and  
adaptive reuse of two vacant buildings in Altgeld





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**Department of Planning and Development's (DPD)  
Commission on Chicago Landmarks Program**

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**Committee meeting.** Unlike regular Commission on Chicago Landmarks meetings, which are led by the City's historic preservation staff, these occasional hearings give the public an opportunity to present ideas for landmarks. People for Community Recovery executive director Cheryl Johnson, an Altgeld Gardens resident, advocated for preserving a school building and the midcentury modern "Up-Top Shop," a commercial building. The "Up-Top Shop" has a breezeway memorializing the names of neighbors who died due to violence or pollution-related illness. Johnson proposed turning the school building into a green technology center and museum named after her mother, Hazel Johnson, who is known as the "mother of the environmental justice movement" for her activism around the negative health effects caused by industrial waste. Of the fifteen sites discussed in the meeting, eight were on the South Side and mostly religious in nature and three on the West Side. The proposals headed to the historic preservation division for review.

*This information was collected in large part using reporting from City Bureau's Documenters at [documenters.org](https://documenters.org).*

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